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AUTHOR Etaugh, Claire
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ABSTRACT

Differences between males and females have been documented for a number of behaviors. Among the environmental determinants of the development of behavioral sex differences is differential treatment of girls and boys by their parents and teachers. This paper reviews and comments on the research literature concerning differential socialization of the sexes. Areas covered include vocalization, social and affectional interactions, motor stimulation, dependency, aggression, sex-typed interests and activities, discipline, and achievement. It is noted that more information on differential treatment of girls and boys is needed for older children, for fathers, and for lower-class families. (Author)

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Claire Etaugh

Bradley University

Abstract

Differences between males and females have been documented for a number of behaviors. Among the environmental determinants of the development of behavioral sex differences is differential treatment of girls and boys by their parents and teachers. This paper reviews and comments on the research literature concerning differential socialization of the sexes. Areas covered include vocalization, social and affectional interactions, motor stimulation, dependency, aggression, sex-typed interests and activities, discipline, and achievement. It is noted that more information on differential treatment of girls and boys is needed for older children, for fathers, and for lower-class families.

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Differential Socialization of Girls and Boys by Parents and Teachers

Claire Etaugh

Bradley University

(Presented as part of a symposium on "Major contributions to individual differences in children," chaired by J. Braun, American Psychological Association, San Francisco, August, 1977).

Differences between males and females have been documented for several behaviors(see Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). These differences appear to be determined by a number of biological and environmental factors. Among the determinants of the development of behavioral sex differences is differential treatment of girls and boys by their parents and teachers.

The extent to which females and males are differentially socialized currently is a hotly debated issue. In their frequently cited reference work, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974, p. 348) comment on what they perceive as the "remarkable degree of uniformity in the socialization of the two sexes." Other writers, however, disagree with this conclusion. For example, both Sherman (1975) and Block (1977), after considering the available evidence, disagree with the Maccoby and Jacklin view that "the reinforcement contingencies for the two sexes appear to be remarkably similar" (p.342). The purpose of this presentation will be to review and comment on the research literature concerning differential socialization of the sexes.

Beginning with vocalization, about half of the studies find no differences in the amount of verbal interaction between parents and

their young children (See Maccoby & Jacklin, pp. 310-311). However, nearly all of the studies showing sex differences find that infant and preschool girls receive more vocalizations than do boys (Cherry & Lewis, 1976; Goldberg & Lewis, 1969; Halverson & Waldrop, 1970; Hoffman & Salzstein, 1967; Kagan, 1971; Lewis, 1972; Lewis & Freedle, 1973; Rothbart, 1971; Thoman, Leiderman & Olson, 1972; Judd & Lewis, Note 1).

The picture for social and affectional interactions between parents and young children is similar to that for verbal interactions in that again, approximately half the studies do not reveal sex differences (see Maccoby & Jacklin, pp. 308-309). Of those that do, most report greater interaction with boys (Gewirtz & Gewirtz, 1968; Jacobs & Moss, 1976; Lewis, 1972; Minton, Kagan, & Levine, 1971; Moss, 1967; Parke, O'Leary & West, 1972; Sears, Rau, & Alpert, 1965; Yarrow, Waxler, & Scott, 1971). Among older children, however, girls tend to report receiving more parental affection (Armentrout & Burger, 1972; Bronfenbrenner, 1960; Cox, 1970; Droppleman & Schaefer, 1963; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967; Siegelman, 1965; Wyer, 1965; Miller, Note 2).

With regard to motor stimulation, it has been found that parents play more vigorously and roughly with infant boys than infant girls (Lewis, 1972; Moss, 1967; Tasch, 1952; Yarrow, Waxler, & Scott, 1971).

Let us now consider the handling of dependency and aggression, the two sex-typed behavior patterns that have been studied most frequently (see Mischel, 1970). During the preschool years, there appear to be no consistent differences either in the encouragement of independence or in the rewarding of dependency behavior (Maccoby & Jacklin, pp. 319, 322). Similarly, studies of young children (up through

6 years of age) do not indicate overall differences in permissiveness toward aggression for girls and boys (Maccoby & Jacklin, pp. 324-325). However, mothers are more permissive of aggression from their sons than their daughters while fathers show the opposite pattern, permitting more aggression from daughters than sons (Block, 1973; Lambert, Yackley, & Hein, 1971; Rothbart & Maccoby, 1966).

Turning to the development of sex-typed interests and activities, studies reveal that parents of preschool children are more disapproving of inappropriate sex-typing in boys than in girls (Fling & Manosevitz, 1972; Lansky, 1967; Fagot, Note 3).

One of the most consistent and reliable differences is found in the area of discipline. Most evidence indicates that boys ranging from infancy through adolescence are punished more than girls by their parents (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Bronfenbrenner, 1960; Minton, Kagan, & Levine, 1971; Newson & Newson, 1968; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957; Siegelman, 1965; Tasch, 1952). Moreover, teachers as well as parents tend to reject, ignore, and criticize boys more than girls (Etaugh & Harlow, 1975; Good & Brophy, 1971; Meyer & Thompson, 1956; Serbin, O'Leary, Kent, & Tonick, 1973; Felsenthal, Note 4). This holds true even when the amount of negative behavior on the part of girls and boys is equated. Interestingly, while boys receive more punishment than girls, they also are likely to receive more attention and praise, particularly in the classroom (Etaugh & Harlow, 1975; Meyer & Thompson, 1956; Serbin et al, 1973; Felsenthal, Note 4).

Evidence concerning pressure for achievement is meager. One clear-cut finding is that parents more often expect their sons to go

to college than their daughters (Sears et al, 1957; Tasch, 1952; Hilton & Berglund, Note 5). At the other end of the education continuum, I will report in a moment some evidence which suggests that preschool education also is valued more highly for boys than for girls.

Maccoby and Jacklin conclude that socialization pressure from parents probably accounts for some sex differences, but not for differences in areas where little differential treatment has been found (e.g., aggression). The validity of this conclusion has been questioned by some psychologists. For one thing, most of the studies concerning socialization of girls and boys have been carried out with preschool children. As Block (1976) notes, most of the research regarding parental permissiveness for dependency or aggression has used subjects 6 years old or younger. She hypothesizes that in these and other areas, parents may respond to their preschoolers more as young children than in terms of gender. Studies of older children yield more evidence of differential treatment of the sexes. (Studies of older children also more often find significant behavioral sex differences than do studies of younger children).

In addition, Sherman (1975) has pointed out that nearly all available research involves mothers, yet there is evidence that fathers may be a greater source of differential treatment than mothers, particularly with respect to sex-typing of their children (Block, 1973; Bronfenbrenner, 1960; Fagot, 1974; Goodenough, 1957; Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974; Sears et al, 1957).

Finally, greater evidence of differential socialization of girls and boys might emerge if more research on lower-class families were available. Some data indicate that sex-typing is encouraged more strongly in lower-class families than in middle-class families (see

Hess, 1970). Consistent with these findings, Etaugh and Hall (Note 6) recently obtained evidence suggesting that socialization pressures are more intense for boys than girls, particularly in lower-class families. It was mentioned earlier that parents more often expect sons than daughters to go to college. If parental expectations regarding differential academic achievement of sons and daughters extend downward to the early school years, then that earliest of educational experiences--preschool education--might also be considered more important for boys than girls. Questionnaires concerning reasons for enrolling one's child in nursery school were completed by nearly 600 parents in a midwestern city. Parents of girls and boys did not differ in mean ratings of reasons. However, a greater number of reasons were rated as more important by boys' parents than by girls' parents for both lower-and middle-class respondents. Proportionately more lower-class boys than lower-class girls were enrolled in the city's nursery schools. No such differences were found for middle-class children. These data suggest that nursery school is valued more highly for boys, especially by lower-class parents.

Clearly, more information on differential treatment of girls and boys is needed for older children, for fathers, and for lower-class families. But even the limited data currently available seem to justify the conclusion that differential socialization of girls and boys contributes to behavioral sex differences.

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3 Fagot, B. I. Sex-determined parental reinforcing contingencies in toddler children. Paper presented at the meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, New Orleans, March 1977.

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5 Hilton, T. L., & Berglund, G. W. Sex differences in mathematics achievement-a longitudinal study. Educational Testing Service Research Bulletin, 1971, (unpublished).

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